

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00
SSO-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03
PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 HA-05 AID-05 /060 W
-----010608 141154Z /10

O R 141031Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4361
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
CINCPAC

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 MANILA 5994

CINCPAC FOR PALAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, RP
SUBJ: THE APRIL 7 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS: PRELIMINARY EVALUATION

REF: MANILA 5323

1. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT MARCOS' NEW SOCIETY MOVEMENT (KBL) APPEARS TO HAVE WON AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF SEATS IN THE APRIL 7 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. STILL INCOMPLETE OFFICIAL TABULATIONS SHOW BENIGNO AQUINO AND THE ONLY SERIOUS OPPOSITION PARTY, LABAN, TO HAVE BEEN TOTALLY DEFEATED AT THE POLLS. IN ADDITION TO MARCOS' PATRONAGE AND PRESSURE DURING THE CAMPAIGN, SUBSTANTIAL GOP MANIPULATION OF THE ELECTION PROCESS EVIDENTALLY PLAYED A KEY ROLE. RESENTMENT APPEARS TO BE SUBSTANTIAL AND SENSE OF PURPOSE MAY HAVE HARDENED AMONG THOSE WHO OPPOSE THE REGIME. STILL VERY MUCH IN CONTROL, MARCOS SEEMS APPREHENSIVE OF ANY THREAT

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TO HIS POSITION FROM FURTHER OPPOSIT MNIST OUTCRY. HE HAS MOVED QUICKLY AGAINST LABAN LEADERS, TAKEN A TOUGH LINE AGAINST OPPOSITION DEMONSTRATORS AND TIGHTENED MEDIA AND OTHER CONTROLS. THE ELECTIONS APPEAR TO BE WIDELY PERCEIVED AS A NET MINUS FOR MARCOS' CREDIBILITY AT HOME AND ABROAD. SIGNS POINT VARIOUSLY TOWARD AN UNEASY POLITICAL PAUSE FOR REASSESSMENT OR A MOUNTING INTERACTION

OF CONFRONTATION EVENTS. PROSPECTS DEPEND UPON
PHILIPPINE PSYCHOLOGICAL AS WELL AS ORGANIZATION FACTORS.
IN ANY EVENT, WE FORESEE CONTINUING TENSION ON POLITICAL
AND CIVILIAN LIBERTIES FRONT AND IN US-RP RELATIONS. END
SUMMARY.

2. OUTCOME. A WEEK AFTER THE ELECTIONS ONLY PARTIAL
OFFICIAL RETURNS HAVE BEEN PROMULGATED. NONETHELESS IT APPEARS
CERTAIN THAT PRESIDENT MARCOS' NEWNOCIETY MOVEMENT (KBL)
HAS WON OVERWHELMINGLY. OF THE 165 REGIONAL SEATS AT
STAKE, THE KBL WIL CORNER APPROXIMATELY 150. IN METRO
MANILA THE ONLY SERIOUS OPPOSITION PARTY, AQUINO'S LABAN,
EVIDENTLY WILL BE SHUT OUT. ONLY IN THE CEBU AREA WILL
A NON-KBL GROUPING, THE MILDLY OPPOSITIONIST PUSYON
BISASZS, WIN A MAJORITY OF SEATS. ELSEWHERE IN THE
PROVINCES, WHERE THERE WAS LITTLE EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION,
ALMOST ALL KBL CANDIDATES ARE LEADING.

3. HOW THE LABAN LOST. A SUPREME MARCOS EFFORT WAS
MADE IN METRO MANILA TO DEFEAT THE FIRST FAMILY'S NUMBER
ONE ENEMY, BENIGNO AQUINO, AND HIS LABAN SLATE. THAT
EFFORT SUCCEEDED, AT LEAST ON PAPER, ALTHOUGH LABAN STILL
MAY BE CREDITED WITH ABOUT 35-40 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL VOTE. TWO
FACTORS WE BELIEVE WERE ROUGHLY EQUALLY EFFECTIVE IN
DETERMINING THE RESULTS: FIRST, THE TREMENDOUS POWER,
PRESS AND PATRONAGE APPLIED BY THE GOVERNMENT DURING
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THE CAMPAIGN; AND SECOND, OUTRIGHT MANIPULATION OF THE
ELECTION PROCESS. OUR BEST SENSE IS THAT, (0-? 3,5 ?95#
*-CTORS, THE LABAN WOULD HAVE WON MOST OF THE METRO MANILA'S
21 SEATS. ABSENT THE SECOND FACTOR, THE LABAN WOULD
PROBABLY STILL HAVE WON A SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF THESE
SEATS. PARENTHETICALLY, ONE MIGHT ASK WHY THE GOVERNMENT
DID NOT MAKE A SIMILAR ALL-OUT EFFORT TO FORESTALL A
PUSYON BISAYAS VICTORY IN CEBU. THE SIMPLEST ANSWER
SEEMS TO BE THAT THE GOP DID NOT BELIEVE IT THAT ESSENTIAL
TO TIS INTERESTS TO WIPE OUT THE PB WHOSE OPPOSITIONIST
CREDENTIALS ARE SUSPECT. FURTHER, IF THE LABAN IS
PROGRAMMED FOR DEMISE IN MANILA, THEN IT IS USEFUL TO
HAVE A LEAST ONE OSTENSIBLY "OPPOSITIONIST" BLOC IN THE
NEW LEGISLATURE.

4. ELECTORAL CHEATING. REPORTS OF ELECTORAL MANIPULATION
AND IRREGULARITIES (MOSTLY ON THE GOVERNMENT SIDE) ARE
LEGION. WHILE THIS CHEATING PROBABLY CAN NEVER BE
QUANTIFIED WITH PRECISION, THE MODIFIERS "SERIOUS" OR
"SUBSTANTIAL," PERHAPS EVEN "MAJOR," ARE LIKELY ACCURATE.
THE LABAN IS ASSERTING "WHOLESALE" FRAUD ON THE PART OF
THE GOP AND, WE UNDERSTAND, HAS LODGED PROTESTS WITH THE

ELECTION COMMISSION CONCERNING THE VOTING IN ABOUT 2,000
(OUT OF 11,500) SPECIFIC PRECINCTS. CERTAINLY THERE IS
A GENERAL PERCEPTION (AMONG OUR DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES,
JOURNALISTS AND MORE APOITICAL FILIPINOS) THAT THE GOP
ENGAGED IN A SIGNIFICANT MEASURE OF FRAUD. THE EXTENT
AND NATURE OF THE CHEATING VARIED THROUGHOUT THE CITY.
APPARENTLY WORD WAS PASSED FROM MALACANANG TO THE MAYORS
AND THEN TO THE BARANGAY CAPTAINS AND THE TEACHERS
(POLLING SUPERVISORS). EACH WAS TOLD TO PERFORM WHATEVER
"MAGIC" WAS NECESSARY TO ASSURE A TOTAL KBL WIN. FRAUD
ALLEGATIONS RUN THE RANGE OF (A) THE USE OF LARGE NUMBERS
OF "FLYING VOTERS"; (B) EVACUATING POLLING PLACES ON
BOMB-SCARE HOAXES AND SUBSTITUTING BALLOT BOXES;
(C) PREVENTING LABAN POLL WATCHERS FROM ENTERING POLLING
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AREAS; (D) FILLING OUT TALLY SHEETS AHEAD OF VOTE COUNTS;
(E) FALSELY INVALIDATING LABAN BALLOTS; (F) INHIBITING
ELECTION OVERSIGHT BY VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS.

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PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 HA-05 AID-05 /060 W
-----010775 141153Z /10

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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
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CINCPAC FOR PALAD

5. FOREIGN PERCEPTION OF THE ELECTION. IT IS CONVENTIONAL WISDOM THAT A PRIMARY REASON MARCOS SCHEDULED THE ELECTIONS WAS TO GIVE EVIDENCE OF HIS PURPORTED MOVE TO "NORMALIZATION" AND THUS IMPROVE HIS IMAGE AND CREDIBILITY ABROAD, PARTICULARLY IN THE U.S. ALONG THE WAY MARCOS ACCEDED TO AQUINO'S CANDIDACY (MANY MARCOS SUPPORTERS SAY "MISGUIDEDLY") AND AQUINO EMERGED BEFORE MARCOS AS A POSSIBLE THREAT TO THIS REGIME. THUS MARCOS READILY SACRIFICED CREDIBILITY IN ORDER TO SAFEGUARD HIS POSITION. BASED ON INITIAL FOREIGN PRESS COVERAGE OF THE ELECTIONS, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THE MARCOS IMAGE HAS NOT BENEFITED BY HE EXERCISE. INDEED A FAIR ASSESSMENT CAN BE MADE THAT THE ELECTIONS HAVE BEEN MORE A MINUS THAN A PLUS FOR MARCOS IN HIS STRUGGLE FOR CREDIBILITY.

6. THE REACTION AT HOME. WE SENSE A SPECIAL QUALITY IN
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THE REACTION THUS FAR TO THESE EVENTS ON THE PART OF OPPOSITIONISTS AND THOSE IN SYMPATHY WITH THEM. THIS MAY BE PARTLY ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE FADED HOPE OF SOME THAT THESE FIRST ELECTIONS SINCE MARTIAL LAW COULD REPRESENT A SIGNIFICANT STEP TOWARD NORMALIZATION. THE DEPTH AND DIMENSIONS OF THE REACTION ARE SOMEWHAT MORE THAN WE HAVE NOTED IN OTHER RECENT OPPOSITION MANIFESTATIONS. IN A BLENDING OF ANGER, SADNESS AND DISILLUSIONMENT, THERE NOW APPEARS MORE STRENGTH OF PURPOSE IN THOSE WHO WOULD OPPOSE MARCOS. THE LABAN AND THEIR SUPPORTERS SEEM DISPOSED TO PRESS THEIR PROTEST THROUGH DEMONSTRATIONS AND OTHER MEANS. IN THIS ATMOSPHERE, RUMORS AND FANTASIES ABOUND. WITH INCREASING FREQUENCY, FOR EXAMPLE, FILIPINO FRIENDS RECOUNT TO US THE TALE OF THE PATIENT AND RESILIENT MALAY-FILIPINO WHO WILL ACCEPT ADVERSITY FOR YEARS UNTIL ONE DAY HE RUNS AMOK. THE CURRENT TWIST TO THIS STORY IS THAT THE ELECTIONS SPELLED THE "END OF DEMOCRACY" IN THE PHILIPPINES AND THAT THE DAY OF RECKONING IS HERE OR FACT APPROACHING. THIS IS BY NO MEANS TO SAY THAT MARCOS IS LOSING HIS GRIP ON THE BODY POLITIC. HE IS STILL VERY MUCH IN CONTROL. BUT ONE MIGHT WONDER IF -- WHEN THE HISTORY OF THE MARCOS PERIOD IS RECORDED -- THE 1978 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS MIGHT BE SEEN AS SOMETHING OF A PSYCHOLOGICAL TURNING POINT IN THE FORTUNES OF THE PRESIDENT.

7. THE MARCOS REACTION. MARCOS IS PROBABLY ANGRY, RESENTFUL, WORRIED ABOUT THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTIONS (INCLUDING THE DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN REACTION), BUT APPREHENSION SEEMS TO BE THE DOMINANT ELEMENT IN HIS

CURRENT MAKE-UP. HE WAS UNEASY LEST AN AQUINO VICTORY
IN MANILA COULD REPRESENT A BODY BLOW TO HIS NEW SOCIETY.
THUS AQUINO HAD TO BE DEFEATED. HE NOW APPARENTLY FEARS
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THAT THE OPPOSITIONIST REACTION TO THE ELECTION EPISODE
MAY LEAD TO AN UNDERMINING OF HIS POWER. THUS HIS
OVERREACTION IN ARRESTING HUNDREDS OF OPPOSITIONIST
DEMONSTRATORS, INCLUDING SEVERAL LABAN CANDIDATES.
THESE APPREHENSIONS ALMOST CERTAINLY WILL REINFORCE HIS
INNATE CONSERVATISM ABOUT MOVING TOWARD A LOOSENING OF
AUTHORITARIAN CONTROLS, IF INDEED THIS WAS HIS INTENTION.
OVER THE NEAR TERM AT LEAST WE WOULD NOT ANTICIPATE REAL
PROGRESS IN THE HOPED FOR RESTORATION OF CIVIL AND POLITICAL
RIGHTS. RETROGRESSION, RATHER, IS A POSSIBILITY. ALREADY,
IN ADDITION TO DRACONIAN MEASURES AGAINST ELECTION
PROTESTERS, MARCOS HAS SIGNALLED A TIGHTENING OF MEDIA
CONTROLS. THERE ALSO ARE STRONG INDICATIONS FROM MARCOS
HIMSELF AND OTHER GOP LEADERS THAT THE LOCAL ELECTIONS
ENVISAGED FOR LATE THIS YEAR WILL BE POSTPONED.

8. IMPLICATION. THE FOREGOING SUGGESTS CONTINUING TENSION
IN THE US-RP RELATIONSHIP. MARCOS, IN REPEATED CAMPAIGN
REFERENCES TO "FOREIGN MEDDLING," ALREADY HAS DEMONSTRATED
HYPERSENSITIVITY TO OUR HUMAN RIGHTS INITIATIVES AND
ESPECIALLY THOSE RELATED TO THE AQUINO CASE. ADVERSE
U.S. REACTIONS TO THE ELECTION PROCESS AND RESULTS OR TO
POST-ELECTION RETRENCHMENT RESPECTING CIVIL AND POLITICAL
LIBERTIES WILL NOT FAIL TO ADD TO THE MARCOSES' SUSPICIONS
THAT THE U.S. GOVERNMENT IS HOSTILE TO THEM AND THEIR
CONTINUATION IN POWER.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ELECTION RESULTS, LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 14 apr 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978MANILA05994
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780160-0818
Format: TEL
From: MANILA
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780457/aaaabwnf.tel
Line Count: 260
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 554ea1b0-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Reference: 78 MANILA 5323
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 30 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2969602
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: THE APRIL 7 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS: PRELIMINARY EVALUATION
TAGS: PINT, RP
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/554ea1b0-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014